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Dewitt, Thomas



COLPORTAGE

AS CONDUCTED

BY THE

American Tract Society:

ITS

NECESSITY, EFFICIENCY,
AND ECONOMY.

MARCH, 1859.

PUBLISHED BY THE
AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY,
150 NASSAU-STREET, NEW YORK.

"THAT THEY ALL MAY BE ONE."

NOTWITHSTANDING the differences among the various denominations of Protestant Christians, it is pleasant to discern their real oneness in their love for institutions designed to explain, enforce, and promulgate the essential doctrines of Christianity. Such an institution is the American Tract Society, with its various branches. The estimation in which it is held by enlightened men of various names is apparent from the subjoined declarations :

"There is no benevolent institution that can lie nearer my heart than the American Tract Society."
Rev. J. G. Schmucker, D. D., Evangelical Lutheran.

"An enterprise which I consider second to none of the benevolent objects of the day in which we live."
Rev. John Codman, D. D., Congregationalist.

"I know of nothing that tends to elevate and bless man for time and for eternity, that this Society does not seek to do for the degraded and the wretched."
Rev. Thomas H. Stockton, Protestant Methodist.

"It is a combination of all benevolent agencies."
Hon. Theodore Frelinghuysen, Reform. Dutch church.

"Over all lands this Society has poured, by the press, millions of streams of light and love. I know of no institution doing so much to fill the vials of incense in the hands of the angel standing by the altar."
Rev. Baron Stow, D. D., Baptist.

"It is a noble enterprise, deserving the hearty encouragement and support of all who seek to promote the cause of Christ's religion among the destitute of our country." Hon. Simeon Greenleaf, Protestant Episcopalian.

"I doubt whether in the world, at this time, there
[See page 3, cover.

COLPORTAGE

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The American Tract Society:

ITS

NECESSITY, EFFICIENCY, AND ECONOMY.

COLPORTAGE—WHAT IS IT?

As conducted by the American Tract Society, Colportage is a system of evangelizing, having special adaptation to the destitute masses, which combines the double power of *the press* and the *living voice*, in earnest effort to bring sinners to the cross of Christ. "Each of these instruments," says Rev. Dr. Brainerd, "has special advantages: the press speaks without liability to impatience, irritation, inconsistency, or prejudice, and gives to truth almost ubiquity, immutability, and immortality; the living voice is effective through social sympathy, adaptation, and repetition."

The Holy Bible, and the more than two thou-

sand distinct issues of the Society, embodying the essential truths of the Bible as held and loved by God's people, are the only books it circulates; the colporteurs it employs are such as have been approved by the churches and ministers to whom they are known, as men of prudence, intelligence, devoted piety, and untiring perseverance.

The field of Colportage, from the origin of the work, has been the whole land; its aim and special adaptation, to reach and supply the wants of those not reached by other agencies.

ORIGIN.

This work originated in 1841, as a work of Christian charity, with the distinctly expressed purpose of giving the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ to those who would not otherwise be reached and supplied. From this purpose it has never swerved. Colportage from the beginning has been specifically an aggressive, outgoing, missionary effort, mainly in behalf of those too poor to purchase the truth, and too widely scattered to be gathered into churches. Its mission is to the highways and hedges. It seeks the destitute, follows the wandering, finds the neglected. Its work and its joy are to bring glad tidings of peace to dwellers in the

wilderness, to comfort the forsaken tenants of lonely cabins, to cheer the toiling laborer with the light of life, and to lift the thoughts of the weary to the world of rest. For this, Colportage was originated.

PRESENT STATE.

From a small beginning the work has grown year by year, making friends and enlisting benevolent aid, until, for the last three years, the Society has employed annually from four to six hundred faithful and earnest colporteurs.

Those who labored during the whole or a part of the last year, exclusive of 174 students in their vacations, were distributed as follows:

In the Northern and Middle states, . . . 157

In the Southern and South-western states, 293

In the Western and North-western states, 156

In Canada and among the Indian tribes, 7

Almost every state and territory has reaped some of its fruits within the year, of which abundant illustrations are found in the Society's Annual Report and the monthly issues of the American Messenger.

SUPERVISION.

For the careful supervision of this widespread work, eight agencies exist, each furnished with a depository of books, and a Superin-

tendent trained in Colportage and well acquainted with its difficulties and capabilities, who is charged with the immediate oversight of a limited number of colporteurs, on a given field; while all are held alike responsible to the Committee at New York.

The ROCHESTER SUPERINTENDENCY has special, personal, and constant care over the colporteurs in Canada West, and in the state of New York, (except in a few of the South-eastern counties.)

The PHILADELPHIA SUPERINTENDENCY, in the states of Pennsylvania and Delaware, and in a part of New Jersey, Ohio, and Virginia.

The BALTIMORE SUPERINTENDENCY, in Maryland, District of Columbia, Virginia, and North Carolina.

The CHARLESTON SUPERINTENDENCY, in South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida.

The NEW ORLEANS SUPERINTENDENCY, in Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas, and Texas.

The ST. LOUIS SUPERINTENDENCY, in Southern and Central Illinois, Missouri, Iowa, Kansas, and Nebraska.

The CHICAGO SUPERINTENDENCY, in Northern Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, and Minnesota.

The CINCINNATI SUPERINTENDENCY, in Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky, and Tennessee.

All other portions of our country, (except the four northern New England states, which by an arrangement of long standing have been cultivated by the American Tract Society at Boston,) are directly supervised by the Committee and executive officers at New York.

Through this carefully arranged system of superintendencies, the Committee are enabled to oversee the entire work in its wide expansion with a constant and intelligent vigilance. An experience which has grown with the enterprise, marking every liability to error and capability for good, taking suggestions from every source, whether offered in kindness or not, and running through seventeen years of anxious solicitude, toilsome effort, and enlarged blessing, enables the Committee to speak with undoubting confidence of the *necessity, efficiency, and economy* of this system of evangelization.

THE NECESSITY FOR COLPORTAGE.

In all herein said urging the palpable, pressing, imperative necessity of Colportage to meet existing wants, there is neither intention nor desire to overlook or undervalue other agencies employed by God's people for the spread

of religion. Rejoicing in these, and wishing them all more abundant success, we still see, and would show, weighty reasons for the more vigorous prosecution of this catholic agency, by which devoted Christian men are made the bearers of sacred and saving truth, printed and spoken, to the millions of the destitute. If Christians were far more devoted, and the instrumentalities employed far more efficient than at present, still would there remain for years uncounted thousands destitute of the gospel.

Nor, in urging this necessity, do we for a moment forget that the church of God, in her distinctly organized form and commissioned ministry, is the grand instrument for perfecting the saints, and carrying forward the work of Christ to his final conquest over sin; but we remember also, that there are vast reaches of sparsely peopled territory, and great numbers of destitute neighborhoods, inaccessible for the present to church organizations, and without printed truth, from which come imploring appeals for an immediate Christian visit from a forerunning instrumentality that shall give them at least some crumbs of the bread of life, and relieve their utter destitution, until a more permanent agency can be established.

In stating the admitted fact that *at least one-third of our population habitually neglect the preaching of a true gospel*, and are therefore hasting unreconciled to the judgment-bar, we but half present to the Christian heart a thought which should move that heart to its depths. The saddest aspect of this fact is, that many ten thousands of these unevangelized ones have no gospel preaching within their reach, no one to warn them of a coming judgment, or invite them to a gracious Saviour—no book, no Bible. In the newer portions of our constantly expanding settlements—a selvedge on the western border of that vast robe of population spreading over this mighty continent, a hundred miles in breadth, extending from the northern verge of our country to the southern seas, and flowing off to California and high up the Pacific coast—are these out-dwellers found; many thousands of whom are beyond the reach as yet, and for the next generation, of regular Sabbath services. Although the church in her distinct ecclesiastical form is pressing on, taking possession of the more prominent points and gathering to her sanctuaries the less scattered settlements, unblest multitudes must remain for years beyond her beneficent embrace.

In addition, there are many portions of the more densely settled states where, from the poverty of the soil, unhealthiness of locality, character of the institutions or other causes, the population is scarce, and without Bibles, books, schools, or churches. To reach and save the inhabitants in these by-ways and mountain fastnesses, cypress swamps, and wide prairies, there is urgent necessity of such an agency as Colportage.

All this would remain true, even if there were no "regions beyond" the compass of our thirty-three states. But when we note the startling fact, that we have a territorial area *more extensive than that covered by all the states already formed*, and thus catch a glimpse of the expansion of our population for ages to come, the necessity, present and prospective, becomes still more imperative.

That wide, numerous, perishing destitutions do now exist, destitutions of a preached gospel, of a printed gospel, of the living epistles as read in the holy lives of pious men; that myriads of youth are growing up in our land without ever hearing a gospel sermon; that in many places where a few Christians have located there is "a famine in the land, not a famine

of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord ;” that in these wastes, ignorance, vice, and infidelity prevail, and that great multitudes of these souls will be lost eternally unless some outgoing, aggressive, personal, persevering effort be made to reach them, is too sadly true to admit of question.

Nor less true, nor less sad is the fact that many *might* hear the gospel who utterly neglect it, and who will never hear it, unless it is *carried to them and urged upon them*.

A few abridged extracts from hundreds which might be made from the letters of colporteurs laboring in different sections of our land, are here given as illustrating and confirming what we have said.

MIDDLE STATES.

“In one of these counties more than half the territory is destitute of a religious teacher.”

“One lady told me she had not been to meeting for six years, another for two, another for eight.”

“In a district twenty-four miles long and fifteen broad, there is neither stated preaching nor Sabbath-school.”

“In a village of 1,200 souls, not above one-fourth attend the sanctuary.”

WESTERN STATES.

“Many neighborhoods are destitute of religious privileges altogether.”

“Whole townships in this county are without any religious meeting, and none but the colporteur to call attention to eternal things.”

SOUTHERN STATES.

“Nearly half the families I visited were destitute of religious reading.”

“One village has neither church nor school-house within three miles, and there is but one professor of religion in it.”

“I have been in many places where the gospel trumpet was never sounded, nor a prayer ever heard by many of the young.”

“Many counties in this state are without a church, minister, Sabbath-school, or common school.”

“Unless the colporteur take good books to these families and talk to them of Jesus, many will grow up and never hear his name.”

“The people have no religious books, no Bibles, no preaching; Colportage alone will reach them.”

“Not more than one-third of the people are supplied with regular preaching, and not more than one-third of these attend.”

“Whole counties in this state cannot, from their peculiar location and sparse population, support churches; hence they are destitute of regular preaching and good books. As their scattered and prejudiced families cannot be reached through the pulpit, we must reach them through the press by Colportage, kindly bringing God’s truth in contact with their minds and hearts at their firesides. The usual objections to denominations, education, Sunday-schools, etc., are forestalled by our statement that we are sent to their houses by Christians of more than twenty denominations, with the single object to point them to Jesus.”

“There are districts of a whole county, and in some portions two or three counties together, where there are no church edifices, and but few or no school-houses; one man could not do in two years what should be done to-day in this wide and destitute field.”

Can any one doubt the urgent need of some aggressive and benevolent agency, which shall seek out the myriads of the destitute, and supply them with divine truth?

THE EFFICIENCY OF COLPORTAGE.

Admitting that there are great and crying destitutions not to be supplied by other agen-

cies for the present generation, the question is pertinent and important, *What can Colportage do towards reaching and supplying them ; what is its mode of working ; what its practical results ?*

A brief and general answer would be found in the simple recital of a colporteur's labor for a given year. You appoint him for a county in Texas, for example. The county is twenty miles square, with a population of 10,000 souls, grouped in 1,800 families, which are located sparsely and irregularly over those 400 square miles. Into the centre of that county you send him, with 2,000 volumes of books, tracts, and plain copies of the Bible. Here he finds, it may be, two feeble churches, with 50 families attached to each, the remaining 1,700 families being without any gospel privileges whatever.

Your colporteur, standing at the centre of his field and looking out over its desolations, feels the glow of a Christlike compassion for the perishing, and with an intelligent purpose to tell them of Christ, he furnishes himself with the Inspired Word, and with Baxters, Bunyans, Doddridges, and Alexanders, who will go with him and visit every family in that county within the year. Not secular nor social visits are these, but each is an earnest, prayerful tearful

effort to turn sinners to God. And when he has told the story of the cross to one family, according to his own feeble ability, and is about to depart, he bequeaths to that family one of his silent but mighty preachers, who shall remain to speak for God from hour to hour, while he toils on through his field. From house to house, from day to day, he goes forward in this work until he has reached the holy Sabbath; then collecting as many of the families as can be induced to attend in a point central to his week's work, he instructs the children, exhorts the parents, reads an awakening tract, and leads them in praise and prayer to that God who will hear and answer.

Another week's work is done, and another Sabbath meeting held, and still another; and thus he presses on till the 52 weeks are fulfilled, the 52 Sabbaths improved, the 1,800 families visited, the 2,000 volumes of saving truth distributed, and the 10,000 inhabitants reached with the gospel offer.

A second year's toil over the same county gathers many fruits of the former planting. A family has ceased Sabbath desecration, a backslider has been reclaimed, a pious mother has been strengthened in training her children for

God, a family altar has been erected, a father has reformed from intemperance, a brother has renounced profanity, an infidel has given up his scepticism, and here and there a soul has been converted unto God. He finds also families clustering about given centres, school-houses going up, parents anxious for Sabbath-schools, an increased demand for religious reading, quickened thought, enlarged intelligence, and general improvement in the domestic, social, and religious aspects of the people.

During the third year this elevating process goes more rapidly forward, for other agencies are coöperating. Churches are formed at various points, the ordinances of God's house are enjoyed, a general and a denominational literature is supplied, common schools are training the children, academies are founded; and your colporteur, the first worker in this field, and a prominent agent in this transformation, perhaps now passes on to new and destitute counties farther on the frontier.

Abundant illustrations confirm this statement. Note the following, drawn from various sections, as brief specimens:

"In several destitute counties a colporteur agency of three years' continuance has resulted

in a general waking up of the people. Sabbath and day schools were multiplied, churches erected, and revivals enjoyed."

"We visited many cabins of the poor, ignorant, and destitute, with no earthly comforts, no Bible, no page about Jesus, no education, no going to church, no religious visit or prayer ever made before. We have met them kindly, and spent an hour talking to them of religion and education, teaching fathers, mothers, and children the alphabet and how to spell, have given them the first religious books they ever owned, and engaged kind friends to visit their cabins and continue their instruction, causing them to feel that they are cared for, that they have minds to cultivate and souls to save. Thus they are brought into Sabbath-schools and common schools, and to hear the preached gospel; and many are led to embrace Christ by God's blessing on the tract or book, or kind word spoken, or earnest prayer offered, or sermon delivered, and are now good citizens and happy Christians."

"Of the 562 families I visited, many had not attended preaching for from three to nine years. I was kindly received at their firesides, where I could adapt both books and talk to their

wants. I was frequently told that our colporteur visits from house to house had awakened increased interest in going to church and in reading. I learned of over 70 Sabbath-schools resulting more or less from Colportage. In one county, where there were only three, there are now 36. In this county, every family, as far as known, was visited and supplied with gospel truth, and over 800 souls are reported to have been converted during the year, many of whom attribute their awakening to books and tracts."

"During the last eleven months I have visited 1,803 families, had religious conversation or prayer with 1,337; more than half of them were habitual neglecters of gospel preaching; 931 had no Bibles."

"There have been many revivals during the last six months—all where there has been the greatest distribution of religious books."

A colporteur gave a little book to a half-clad youth who had only begun to read. It was the means of his conversion. Two years after, he became a colporteur, and went from house to house for nearly four years, talking, praying, and circulating books and tracts, by which many souls were led to Christ. He was

then licensed to preach, and by his labors in the ministry, a little over two years, about 200 souls were hopefully led to Christ.

A colporteur for five years in the West, who was himself converted from infidelity through reading Nelson's "Cause and Cure," says, "I am surprised at the number of hopeful conversions. I have seen the hardened and well-read infidel renounce his infidelity, and die trusting in Jesus. I have seen the abandoned of both sexes forsake their wicked ways, and to all appearance hopefully converted to God. I have heard the business man thank God for the day I came into his counting-room and pressed on him the subject of religion, and sold him Nelson to remove his scepticism. I have seen the gay and accomplished lady, fond of the party and the dance, forsake all and unite herself with the people of God. And the poor, that had not clothes to go to the house of God, I have heard singing the songs of redeeming love amid their poverty and want. I have been at the bed of the dying poor, reading God's word and whispering in their ear, Look to Jesus; and have received letters from fields formerly visited, showing that my labors had been blessed of God. While lying on a sick-

bed, I could call up to mind more than sixty individuals that had, I hope, been converted by means of personal labors and our precious books. In all the towns but one I have visited there have been some conversions. The colporteur work is a glorious work. I wonder that men who are able to support themselves do not enter the work."

Want of space alone prevents additional citations, telling of children taught to read; of schools formed; of Bibles and good books introduced, read, and loved; of Sabbath-schools organized; of distilleries closed, drunkards reclaimed, and dissevered families reunited; of corrupting literature banished; of errors renounced and infidels convinced; of backsliders reclaimed, mourners comforted, family altars erected; of many souls converted unto God, and churches built for his worship, largely through the agency of Colportage.

Such facts, considerately stated and well authenticated, many of which appear in the American Messenger, crowd our correspondence until the Committee cannot doubt that the constant blessing of God is rendering Colportage efficient to advance his glory.

The results of the last year's labor are most cheering, and show a larger blessing than has been visible in any preceding one. This was to be expected in a year when God's Spirit has been so abundantly poured out upon every means of evangelization.

It will not seem strange that such results follow this unpretending instrumentality, when we note the *elements of efficiency* it combines.

1. It uses only the *most impressive truths*. All truth is mighty, accompanied by the divine Spirit; yet that Spirit usually employs, in regenerating sinners and sanctifying his people, those great truths that centre in and cluster about the cross of Christ. These take strongest hold of the human heart, most deeply enlist and engross human thought, and most largely mould human character, and because they are concerned about the soul's destiny, and reach into and compass the realities of the eternal world. Those vital and cardinal doctrines which teach of God's holiness, man's sinfulness, Christ's sacrifice, the Spirit's work, and the future awards, are those alone which the colporteur employs. First, his own heart must be filled with their preciousness, and carried captive by their power, and his most earnest longing be

to make them known to others ; and then, that he may be fully furnished, he is supplied with hundreds of treatises, all teaching, illustrating, enforcing, and reiterating them in every form and with every argument which the piety and talent of the past and present have devised. With such equipment he engages in his work.

2. In the use of these powerful truths he is armed with a *singleness of purpose*, which is never without its reward. He has but one desire of heart, God's glory ; but one purpose of mind, to save men ; one mode of action, unceasing toil ; one instrument of success, saving truth. He loses no time in controversy, no strength upon side issues, no temper on disputed questions or doubtful points, but presses on in the one work with concentrated energy.

3. This singleness of aim brings out the *catholicity of his spirit and mission* to all, and wins him access to many hearts and families, where a denominational bearing would close the doors against him. Such a living demonstration of the unity of Christ's people overcomes the captious objections of unbelievers, and predisposes them to hear the messages of mercy from his lips, and receive the volumes of vital truth he offers.

4. The *true aggressiveness* of this enterprise, which, with singleness of purpose and catholicity of spirit, taking those impressive truths, carries them out to the destitute and perishing, and with earnest voice and tearful eye and loving heart pleads with the poor and halt and maimed and blind to accept of Christ, gives it immense efficiency as a means of evangelizing.

RESULTS OF SEVENTEEN YEARS.

Perhaps a more comprehensive and impressive view of the efficiency of this system may be obtained by a glance at some of the grand results gathered from its brief history of seventeen years' effort.

Above eight million volumes of saving truth have been distributed by Colportage, and largely among those most in need of saving truth. This one fact shows its power in diffusing a catholic religious literature among the masses to an extent scarcely possible by any other existing agency. Nearly two million volumes have been given to those unable or unwilling to buy, thus furnishing to the perishing the bread of life, without money and without price.

When we state that our colporteurs have addressed 160,000 public or social meetings,

in many cases where there was no minister to tell of Jesus, we give another view of its efficiency in reaching the destitute.

Nor less convincing is the evidence of its capability for good, as seen in the fact that in 3,231,000 families, containing about 15,000,000 souls, they have engaged in religious conversation tending to lift their thoughts to God, in many thousands of these families offering the first prayer ever heard in their habitations. The Omniscient mind alone can grasp the results of such wide spread Christian visitation among those else unvisited by soul-loving laborers for Christ.

A still more impressive illustration of the efficiency of this system, is seen in the fact that the Society's colporteurs have made *seven million religious family visits*. When we remember the blessed influences which have followed a single Christian visit to an ungodly house, in turning away its inmates from sin, and bringing them to the cross, and are assured that no honest, earnest, scriptural effort for Christ is in vain, who shall grasp the magnitude of results which God may yet bring out of these seven million Christian visits—results to the praise of his glorious grace?

But this agency has also revealed fearful destitutions, which should wake us to more earnest exertions in its future prosecution. Colporteurs have found 925,007 families, or about 4,600,000 souls, who attended no evangelical preaching, going down to death in the midst of a gospel land unheeding the calls of mercy. This fact alone were enough, it would seem, to unite the whole American church in persevering prayer, "O Lord, send forth more laborers into the harvest."

When we know that an energetic colporteur may reach annually 10,000 of these careless ones with the means of salvation, is it strange that in deep earnestness we plead with those redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, and in whose hands he has placed the means, to give their hundreds and even thousands to extend a system of evangelization of such large capability and undoubted efficiency?

Colportage has found 399,235 families, who were destitute of God's word, and 643,696 families, or about three and a third millions of souls, who possessed not a page of evangelical truth.

Do these millions of our brethren, within our immediate reach, call for our efforts any less loudly than the far off heathen?

When such wide spread and admitted destitutions exist of spoken truth and printed truth, and when an agency is at hand to carry this printed truth to every unsupplied habitation, and to utter in the ears of all gospel neglecters earnest words of warning, instruction, and entreaty, is it asking too much of the churches of Christ that they would increase their prayers and benefactions on its behalf, until it has sought out every neglected habitation in our land, and told the story of the cross to every wanderer from Christ?

THE ECONOMY OF COLPORTAGE.

In urging this mode of evangelization as a careful and wise expenditure of the Lord's money, we by no means assert that it returns directly into the treasury a like number of dollars. Far otherwise. It was originated as a work of Christian charity, and has ever appealed to the benevolent for support. Without charitable aid it would cease.

Some colporteurs exhaust the whole amount of publications put into their hands to meet expenses; others return a portion of the proceeds to pay for more books. For example: a colporteur in Minnesota is furnished with

books and tracts to the amount of \$500, with which to carry forward colportage for a year. At its close suppose his account stands thus :

| | | | |
|------------------------------------|-----------|-------|-------|
| Dr., To books and tracts received, | . . | \$500 | |
| Cr., By salary, | | \$200 | |
| " books given away, | | 100 | |
| " allowance for conveyance, | | 50 | |
| " travelling expenses, | . . | 50 | 400 |
| | | | <hr/> |

Returned to the treasury out of the

\$500 furnished, \$100

Of course, in the case supposed, the difference between the cost of the \$500 worth of books furnished and the \$100 returned, must be made up by benevolence. As a pecuniary transaction, it will not pay. As a soul-saving enterprise, it returns a thousand-fold. If we cannot *preach* the gospel to the poor and destitute as a self-sustaining work, why should we expect to make the dissemination of a *religious literature* among them self-sustaining? It is just as needful to sustain living men, with hands to work and hearts to throb with love and zeal, to go forth and hunt up the destitute, and put words of truth into their hands, as it is to sustain missionaries to preach salvation with the living voice. If the presentation of divine truth to

the human heart through the eye be a matter of moment, if Christians in this land are not prepared to throw away the million-tongued press as a means of saving souls, they must continue to support Colportage, or something like it, as a *benevolent scheme*. When men shall have the same zeal to build churches and sustain missions and save souls, that impels them to go into bank and railroad and steam-boat operations, then, and not till then can you safely turn over the heaven-blessed influence of the Christian press to the ordinary instincts of trade.

The question, then, is not whether we shall furnish the destitute with a saving literature, through the channels of trade *or* by Colportage, but whether it shall be done by Colportage *or not be done at all*.

To reach the neglected millions will cost money ; but money may not be put in the balance against immortal interests. What shall it profit a man to gain the whole world, and lose his soul ? And if souls in the waste places are perishing by thousands for want of the bread of life which might be supplied by Colportage, shall we stop coldly to calculate how many dollars it will cost ? Nay, nay ; bid the

messengers of mercy go forth at whatever cost of money, time, toil, and self-denial, if only precious souls may be saved.

Such, we are sure, is the feeling of every Christian heart contemplating the desolations of our land, with even a spark of that pity which glowed in the breast of our Lord when upon earth he compassionately beheld the multitudes who wandered as sheep without a shepherd. It must cost money; and much of the toil may be lost, many of the books sold will lie unread, and many of those given will seem a waste of precious funds; yet this homage of faithful service to Jesus will not be unrewarded. We would not take counsel of him who complained that a box of ointment was wasted which might have been sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor—not that he cared for the poor. His error will become ours, if we value services rendered to Christ merely as it returns dollars into the treasury. If this be a necessary work, an efficient work, it must be done at whatever cost. “Never,” in the words of a distinguished professor of ecclesiastical history, “in all the history of the church, has there been so powerful an instrumentality, which could be worked so cheaply.

Colportage is just the thing for us in our emergency, and it costs but little."

Still, the Committee have ever striven to reduce the actual outlay to the lowest point consistent with efficiency. The result attained, as seen in the Treasurer's report for 1858—an expensive and trying year to all benevolent operations—was a sum total average cost, including salary, conveyance, and expenses of a regular colporteur laboring in the country, of \$262 41; and of one laboring in the city among the foreign population, of \$367 56. Is not either of these a sufficiently meagre sum to compensate for the toil and self-denial of a work so much needed and so efficient?

Whether it be possible to conduct at less cost, and yet with efficiency, an enterprise involving so much care and labor, and extending its ramifications to almost every state and territory of our country, it would be needless to affirm or deny; but the Committee see not how any additional economy can be effected, nor have they evidence that the church desires it.

These statements they have thought it well to make, that the thousands of God's children who are cheerfully contributing to sustain and extend this heaven-blessed agency, may see,

not only the necessity and efficiency of the work, but the economy with which it is conducted.

The limits of this document will not allow a full presentation of all the various aspects of this subject. The Committee cannot more fittingly close this brief statement to the Christian public, than in the glowing words of one who, for fifteen years, gave himself with singular fidelity and ability to the development of American Colportage.

Having its origin in prayerful compassion for the destitute, it has more than realized the hopes of its early friends, while it is believed to have disappointed the fears of those who entertained doubts of its necessity and utility. It has proved itself everywhere and at all times the cordial friend and humble auxiliary of the ministry. It has coöperated harmoniously with all other agencies for evangelization. It has done much to explore and reveal the moral wastes of our vast country, and to awaken in the churches a spirit of active home charity. It has stimulated a thirst for religious knowledge, and aroused attention to popular education. It has contributed to bring

the wants of the various emigrant classes before the minds of American Christians, and to elicit active, prayerful sympathy in behalf of these strangers in a strange land. It has helped to work out the great problem of successful dealing with the followers of Rome. It has given employment to a vast amount of lay talent and piety, otherwise undeveloped, and comparatively inoperative. It has furnished a field for the practical training of large numbers of the candidates for the sacred ministry, so much needed and increasingly valued. It has done its part to expose and circumscribe the issues of a vicious and licentious press, and to preoccupy such ground as is not yet blighted with the presence of a corrupt literature. It has encouraged and created a demand for the publications of a high moral and religious tendency now sent forth from the presses of private publishers and sister publishing institutions. It has deposited truth enough to save immortal souls, if received into the heart and blessed of the Spirit, in probably not far from one half the households of our entire population; and it has accompanied the diffusion of its millions of evangelical volumes with words of personal religious counsel and warning, and

with fireside prayer. Its humble pathway may be traced from the gulf to the lakes, and from ocean to ocean, by the resonant echoes of Baxter's Call, or the startling tones of Alleine's Alarm, or the deep foot-prints of Bunyan's Pilgrim. Where trusting childhood seeks a guide; where maternal anxiety demands aid in its immortal task; where ignorance needs its night dispelled; where error claims the light of "truth in love;" where affliction asks a solace; where convicted souls invite direction to the cross; where thirsting saints long for the Fountain of life—on the mountain side, along the prairies, in the forest, among the mines, on the emigrant ships, in the rail-car—whether in log-cabins or stately mansions, in cities, villages, or hamlets, over our broad continent, *there* may be found the "leaves of the tree of life," prayerfully scattered by the system of American Colportage.

And the blessing of God has been with it and upon it. North, south, east, and west attest it. Beloved pastors and missionaries confirm the official statements of our fellow-laborers, who rejoice in the repeated proofs of souls converted, spirits quickened, or revivals promoted by the blessing of the Holy Spirit

on the evangelical publications or the personal labors in this department of benevolence. With full and grateful hearts, and in the spirit of self-distrust and self-abasement, the Committee would unite with their fellow-laborers and with the redeemed of every name in the ascription of undivided praise to the triune God for all his smiles on this humble but hopeful enterprise. His is the work, to Him be all the glory.

By order of the Executive Committee,

THOMAS DE WITT, Chairman.

TRACT-HOUSE, New York, March 2, 1859.

exists an organization, the Christian ministry excepted, which is more effective in diffusing a knowledge of the truths of the gospel among all classes of people." Rev. A. Alexander, D. D., Presbyterian.

"I wish to bear a simple, honest, independent testimony in behalf of its constitution and labors, its principles and action, and noble purposes. Its list of publications excites my wonder and admiration, and I rejoice in its colporteur system." Rev. Dr. Duff, India.

"Its full value and importance could only be appreciated, like that of every other precious thing, by its loss. Its extinction would create a wailing throughout the length and breadth of the land, and in distant islands of the sea." Rev. Dr. Thomas Smyth, Presbyterian.

"In surveying the great work, and the interests of true religion in this land, especially in the wonderful revival of religion in these few months past, I fully believe that there is not an agency in our whole country of equal value and importance, and of equally approved and established efficiency in the conversion of souls, and the glory of the Saviour, apart from the divinely appointed institutions of the church of God, with that of this great and glorious institution." Rev. S. H. Tyng, D. D., Protestant Episcopalian.

"If you want the union of all who love Christ, all who will wear crowns of gold, and have golden harps in their hands in heaven, and have no denominational distinction, no, not even a lattice-work between them, then you will love the Tract Society." Rev. E. N. Kirk, D. D., Congregationalist.

Here is a Christian union, not constrained, but free—union from love of the same things—union of mind and of heart. That Christians should be thus united must be "well pleasing" to Him who prayed that his disciples might be one.

THE AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY

Consists of members of different evangelical denominations, united to diffuse the knowledge of Christ and him crucified, by its publications, associated with personal Christian effort, at home and abroad. The Board of Directors embraces members of fourteen denominations. The Publishing Committee consists of a member from each of six communions, and no work is issued unless unanimously approved. More than 2,000 publications, of which about 400 are volumes, have been stereotyped in eleven languages, besides more than 3,000 approved for publication at foreign stations. The American Messenger has a circulation of nearly 200,000, German Messenger 27,000, The Child's Paper 300,000.

The Executive Committee, to conduct the business of the Society, consists of the members of the three following Committees, each of which three Committees monthly report their proceedings to the Executive Committee.

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The donation of \$20 at one time constitutes a Life-member; the addition of \$30, or \$50 at one time, a Life-director. Funds may be remitted to O. R. Kingsbury, Assistant Treasurer, 150 Nassau-street, New York.